

"Through a Crowd, Bravely"

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In a historical context, 50 years isn't even a blink of an eye. However, when you look back at the landscape of New Orleans public schools 50 years ago, you see a different world. With an eye toward that alien landscape, the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University is running an exhibition through December called "Through a Crowd, Bravely."



School integration in New Orleans was difficult, "but eventually, the ice began to melt and people started coming together a little bit," says Clarence Holmes, a member of the first integrated class at Warren Easton High School. (Photos from the Alan Wieder Collection.)

As a part of a series of events to commemorate desegregation in the New Orleans schools, the [Amistad](#) invited Clarence Holmes, a former Southern University professor, to read an essay about his experience as a member of the first integrated class at Warren Easton High School.

"I was very surprised when I got the letter telling me that I was supposed to go to Warren Easton," Holmes says. "I was very afraid, frankly."

Holmes remembers the first day of class when a number of white teachers walked out in protest of having to teach black students, and never returned ? an inauspicious start to his high school career.

“Many of the teachers were hesitant to work with black children at the beginning. I suspect many of them were sold on the idea we were unteachable,” Holmes says.

Holmes admits that as a naïve 15-year-old he didn't recognize the nature of what was “swirling around” him at that time.

“I had no sense of the history of this time while it was happening,” Holmes says. “Obviously as I got older and began to look back, I saw how I was caught up in the middle of this monumental time. I think it was a great thing that happened.”

As divided as the school was that fall of 1968, Holmes saw marked change by the time he graduated, three short years later.

“If there's any pride, I think it's in the fact that there were people on both sides who decided to make it work,” Holmes says. “I am proud of the people on the ground, going through those situations, and the fact they didn't give up.”